

# THE ULTIMATE INTERVIEW GUIDE

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# INTRODUCTION

Hello! I am Megan, a Trainee Solicitor at an International London Law Firm and the founder of It's All Hearsay. Thank you for downloading the It's All Hearsay Ultimate Interview Guide.



## **It's All Hearsay**

It's All Hearsay was created to offer help, guidance and motivation to all aspiring lawyers.

If you don't already know, I found the journey to becoming a Trainee Solicitor hard. I constantly felt alone and that there was no information out there. Therefore, I want to make sure no one feels the way I did.

I believe there is certainly an art to getting this journey right and while mistakes and setbacks are unavoidable, I want to be a person who will help you to never give up. I also want to provide you with hints and tricks to get you there with a few less hiccups.

## **About this guide**

I have put this guide together for all law students and applicants because interviews are notoriously hard within the industry.

In this guide, I will share my best preparation tips, how to answer different styles of interview questions and perspectives and experiences of the industry from many within the legal community. This guide will also provide you with worked examples and recent questions used within this cycle.

Hopefully this guide will help you with everything from a legal internal role to a paralegal role or to a vacation scheme or training contract interview. Simply tailor the questions to suit your situation!

# APPRECIATION AND FEEDBACK

Before we get into the good stuff, I would like to say a big thank you to all of the contributors in Section 8.

Each contributor (in their free time) has provided some really valuable and insightful tips and perspectives into the interview process.

Our contributors come from varying different backgrounds and all are hugely inspiring. So - if something resonates you with, please do go and check out their socials and show them some love.

I would also like to share my appreciation for my team, Gwen Evans and Tamsin McLeod. Without them, this guide would not have been possible.

Finally, and as a reminder, a big thank you to YOU for pushing yourself to continue this career path and believing in yourself. Without you, you would not be in this position so give yourself some much needed credit!

## **FEEDBACK**

If you have any feedback about this guide or would like to discuss any of the points further, please do email me at [itsallhearsay@outlook.com](mailto:itsallhearsay@outlook.com) or send me a message on Instagram at [@itsallhearsay](https://www.instagram.com/itsallhearsay).

I would love to hear from you!

This community is about building on experiences and hearing a variety of perspectives so keep helping others and letting others have a voice.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Megan xx". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

# PREPARING FOR AN INTERVIEW: RESEARCH

Good preparation is the key to smashing any interview but how do you prepare adequately for the unknown?!

Well, you probably have already taken the first few steps in creating your application. Therefore, refresh your memory on what you learnt during that process. You then want to spend at least 2-3 hours conducting further research into the firm you are interviewing at.

## You need to have an idea of the following:

- What practice areas does it have?
- Who are the firms competitors?
- What interesting cases is the firm involved with?
- Who are the lawyers that are making the headlines?
- What is the firm most known for?

## You will also need to think about:

- How many people work at the firm?
- What awards does the firm have?
- What are their core values?
- Where does the firm place in the Legal 500 and Chambers Guide?
- How many trainees/paralegals do they take on per year?

Before an interview, I also like to try and build a personal connection to the firm. This could come from a past experience such as attending a law fair, networking event or even through LinkedIn. By reaching out to some juniors on LinkedIn, you might be able to politely ask some questions about the firm. This will give you a very good insight into the type of people that work at the firm and could potentially spark a conversation during the interview itself.

# PREPARING FOR AN INTERVIEW: STAR METHOD

Next, it is important to think about the experiences and skills you have. Try and write a list of all the important and noteworthy achievements you've had to date. This will help you focus your answers and help you to be less repetitive. Each and every answer you give should be backed up with an example and linked to the firm you are interviewing at. This will make you relatable and demonstrate that you can answer questions coherently and logically.

The STAR method is incredibly useful when answering any question. It stands for:

- Situation
- Task
- Approach/Action
- Result

- **Situation** - describe the situation you were in and set the scene.
- **Task** - what did you need to accomplish and what was expected of you?
- **Approach/Action** - how did you contribute/how did your actions resolve the issue?
- **Result** - can the resolution be quantified/how has this improved and/or enhanced your skills?

**S:** I became a GCSE English Tutor to generate extra income alongside my studies. Example  
**T:** One student was struggling with English GCSE and wanted to improve their grade.  
**A:** I devised an intensive eight-week revision timetable, tailoring it to the student's current grades and predicted marks.  
**R:** The student achieved a high level 6, a grade much higher than expected. Due to our success, they asked me to tutor them at A-level. I enhanced my communication skills and my ability to tailor my approach, establish long-lasting relationships along with a problem-solving attitude.

# PREPARING FOR AN INTERVIEW: PREPARING

It is good to have at least one example or experience that is reflective of one of the top skills for the role. Skills the recruiter may expect you to have are: drive and initiative, resilience, communication, leadership, time management, organisation, teamwork, flexibility, analytical skills and the ability to work under pressure. You can either write out answers you think you may need or jot down a couple of bullet points for each idea.

Once you have your examples written down and are comfortable with the STAR method, you should think about practising your answers aloud. This will help you to judge how long they are and whether you speak at the right pace. It is important to sell yourself in interviews and answer questions fully but it is also important to not waffle. Therefore, there is a fine balance and to find this sweet spot takes practice.

To assist, you can either record yourself speaking so you can listen to your answers back or you could just time yourself. A full answer should take anywhere between 1 - 3 minutes.

It can also be really helpful to attend a mock interview with a close relative or friend. Your connections will help you to amend any answers and make sure they portray you in the best light.

Just like you have to be careful not to speak for too long, it is also a good idea not to over prepare. You cannot prepare for every single question - doing too much can be counter-productive. You need to be able to speak off the cuff and come up with answers on your feet. Especially, as a lot of the time you will be given curve balls. If you practice with someone - ask them to throw in a couple questions that you haven't answered before.

# PREPARING FOR AN INTERVIEW: COMMERCIAL AWARENESS

Commercial awareness is about having a conscious grasp of how businesses operate, what makes them successful, how they compete and what industry knowledge and news will impact them.

This means understanding not only how client's businesses operate and how the news is affecting the business world but also how the law firm itself maximises profits and efficiency.

The biggest benefit of being commercially aware is it provides you with the necessary tools to contribute to the conversation. Not only does this make you look impressive and that you are switched on but also makes applying real life scenarios to the firm's clients easy. Building up your commercial awareness takes time, therefore, this should be started way before you even start applying. However, it is most important when being interviewed.

To stay consistent: make sure you spend 10-15 minutes a day reading the top headlines, listening to a podcast or watching short videos. If you find something that grabs your attention; take notes! This will help you to retain information. Make sure your notes are clear and precise and do not forget to note down the source. Try and work out what the firm is currently focused on and what market trends could disrupt their ways of operating or client offerings.

Podcasts are such a good way to obtain bitesize information quickly. You can pop them on while going for a walk, when you are cooking dinner or getting ready in the morning. Book Recommendation: "All You Need to Know About The City" by Christopher Stoakes. This book breaks down key impacting issues into a readable form. The approach to complex issues is fascinating and will help you in preparation for interviews and assessment centres.



# PREPARING FOR INTERVIEW: ETIQUETTE

Dress smart! This may seem really obvious but a lot of interviewees tend to forget that they are entering a business meeting. The firm wants to see how you would present yourself to their clients so make sure you wear your best outfit (especially if this is an interview taking place remotely). There is no need to splash out on clothes or look like Meghan Markle but taking pride in what you wear will get you in the right mood and ensure the interviewer takes you seriously.

Make sure you are polite to everyone you meet. There have certainly been some horror stories about interviewees being dismissive or slightly rude to reception staff and/or secretaries. Be warned that it is likely these people are also part of your evaluation. They will report back to the senior members of the team and if you have been impolite, guarantee this will be held against you. This includes the time spent liaising with someone over email before the interview.

Interviews are meant to be a two-way street. This is your opportunity to see if the firm is good for you. Don't be afraid to ask your own questions! It is also good to make sure the interview feels conversational and you aren't just answering their questions. This includes asking about the interviewer's day and other formalities. This will make you seem extremely enthusiastic and that you are easy to get on with.

If you are nervous or need time to think about a question, make use of the water in front of you. Take a sip and think about what is being asked of you. Try not to second guess what the interviewer wants and instead think about what is true to you. Take your time! If you think you are going too slow, it's probably just right. If you feel the urge to say "I'm really nervous" switch it to "I'm really excited to be here". This will help you to calm the nerves and manifest good feelings.

# PREPARING FOR INTERVIEW: THE NIGHT BEFORE

First and foremost, get your things ready. This means picking out your outfit and making sure it's cleaned and ironed. Get your bag ready with anything you need to take with you. Good things to take or have around you at interview are: a water bottle, a note book and pen and a copy of your CV and application. This will help you to not get flustered the morning before and give you extra time to relax. These things will also help you to look professional during the interview!

Check the interview invite. Make sure you are comfortable with where you need to travel to or what software you need to use if it is virtual. If it is a virtual interview, do a test run. This means preparing your background, making sure you have the correct lighting and that your internet connection is stable. You should also double check the time of the interview and plan your journey/morning so that you arrive around 15 minutes early or at least 5 minutes if it is virtual.

This goes without saying but try your hardest to get a good night sleep. Being refreshed and feeling bright will really help you to perform your best on the day. This can be easier said than done so creating a night time routine a few days before will help. Some of my favourite tips are to have a hot bath or shower, read a few pages of a book or go over my research. Having time to read my notes as the last thing I do before bed makes me feel focused and prepared.

Fuel your brain and energy levels at least an hour before your interview. Have a good breakfast or lunch (depending on the time of your interview) and, if appropriate, have a small coffee. Remember: too much caffeine could make you over anxious and jittery. If you are super nervous, try some breathing techniques and repeat positive affirmations because you do deserve to be there and you will do amazingly.

# IMPROVING YOUR INTERVIEW TECHNIQUE

Having a good interview technique can be likened to a hierarchy of needs. First and foremost you need to be able to get the basics. Once you have that nailed down, your approach needs to be tailored appropriately to the type of firm you are interviewing at. Finally, you need to demonstrate you understand how to conduct yourself and that you have good interview etiquette. A diagram explaining this in more detail, is set out below:



# COMMONLY ASKED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

This next section sets out a variety of questions from this interview/training contract application cycle. Each question has been collected from lots of interviewees, interviewing at a wide range of firms at differing stages of their legal careers.

This section is not meant to be an exhaustive list of the questions you will get or meant to be relied upon in terms of the firm you are interviewing at. However, I hope they will give you a strong indication into what you may expect at your chosen firm.

You should do your own research into the questions you might receive from the firm you are interviewing at and think on your own accord.

It must be stressed that some of these questions may never be used again in an interview cycle and therefore, should be treated as guidance only.

# COMMONLY ASKED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## COMPETENCY

### All firms

- Tell us about a time that you have worked well as a team.
- Describe a situation where you acted on your own initiative.
- Explain a time when you went beyond the expected to achieve a goal?
- Give an example of when you faced failure and how did you cope?
- Could you give me an example of when you had to deal with an unexpected situation?
- Describe a situation in which you were aspiring to reach a goal. What obstacles confronted you along the way? What did you do to overcome them?
- Give an example of when you had to juggle priorities. What was the outcome?
- How would you deal with a difficult client?

### Magic Circle firms

- Give us an example of you building a relationship with a stakeholder.
- What do you think you'll struggle with when starting the role?

### US firms

- What is your biggest weakness?
- What would you say is your biggest area for development at the moment?

### Mid-sized commercial firms

- Tell us about your greatest achievement.
- How would you persuade a client to go with us over another firm?
- How would your friends/family describe you?
- Give an example of a time you had to take up the role of a leader at short notice?

These questions are perfect for applying the STAR method and are specifically designed to bring out your skills and experience for the role.

# COMMONLY ASKED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## MOTIVATIONS

### All firms

- Why this firm?
- Why law?
- How would you describe yourself using three words?
- How would you make yourself stand out as a [insert role]?
- Please spend 60 seconds introducing yourself.
- Why are you interested in this role?
- Please give us an example of how you prioritise and organise work?
- How do you deal with a personal setback?
- Why do you want to be a solicitor?

### Magic circle

- Tell us what's important to you in a workplace?

### US firms

- Where do you see yourself in five years?
- In your opinion what is better, completing a piece of work on time or taking the necessary time to ensure that the work is to the highest standard?
- You notice a fellow trainee struggling with their work, what do you do?
- What are the benefits of working in new ways and embracing change?

### Mid-sized commercial firms

- How do you stay motivated at work?
- Why did you choose your university?
- How do you go about organising your time and assessing priorities?
- Which other firms have you applied to? What stage are you at with them?

These types of questions are designed to understand your personality, aspirations and working style. Questions like these will help a recruiter to decide how you might fit in within the workplace and as part of a team.

# COMMONLY ASKED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## COMMERCIAL AWARENESS

### All firms

- Why do you want to train with us over our competitors/how would you persuade a client to go with us over another firm?
- What do you know about the ways in which we engage with our clients?
- What could we do to improve our client services?
- What is the main challenge facing law firms today?
- Tell us about a recent news article you are interested in and how has it progressed?
- Why do you want to train with us rather than with our competitors?

### US firms

- Why is AI not the solution to big law?
- Explain inflation to a 6 year old.
- Why do companies engage in mergers and acquisitions with their rivals?

### Mid-sized commercial firms

- What is the most significant impact of COVID-19 on law firms?
- How can firms improve their environmental footprint?
- What do you know about the ways in which we engage with our clients?
- Do you think technology and AI could replace lawyers?
- Explain how you demonstrate commercial awareness.

### High-street firms

- What do you think of our client services approach?
- How would you demonstrate to a client that you are commercially aware?

As you will have guessed, these questions are designed to test your technical knowledge and how you can apply the real world problems and things impacting the business world to the law firm and its clients. Always think about the bigger picture and relate your answers to the firm.

# COMMONLY ASKED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## MISCELLANEOUS

### Mid-sized commercial firms

- What three historical figures would you invite to dinner and why?
- What business leaders do you admire and why?
- What would your ideal day be like?
- Would you break the law if you were in an emergency?
- You spot your supervisor doing something wrong, what do you do?

### International firms

- Would you rather be able to fly or be invisible? Please explain why.
- How do you explain the colour yellow to a blind person?
- If you could bring any law into force, what would it be and why?

### US firms

- How do you respond to criticism?
- What did you not like about your previous job?
- Tell us about something you are passionate about and explain why.
- How long is the London tube network?

### High-street firms

- What biscuit would you be and why?
- Based off your performance today, do you think you have got the position at this firm?
- What drink would you be and why?
- Why have you chosen this office location over a London or regional firm?

These questions are designed to put you on the spot and make you feel pressured or ease the tension in the room. Don't panic! Think logically. There is no right answer to these questions. The interviewer will want to see that you can think under pressure and explain how to get from A to B. Think of these questions as a maths question. You won't get any marks for just giving the answer – you need to show your workings out!



# QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD ASK AT INTERVIEW

It is usually a very good idea to do some research into your interviewers and find out (if applicable):

- Where they went to university;
- What cases they are involved in recently;
- Whether they have written any recent articles;
- Whether they trained at the firm;
- How long they have been at the firm; and
- How long they have been qualified.

This will help you to be conversational and when they ask you questions you can say "I see you studied at x, did you enjoy that?". You could also link your answer to their practice area and then say "I noticed you worked on x recently, can you tell me a little bit more about it?" or "what does the usual day to day tasks for this case involve?"

Another good question to ask is "what is your favourite experience or memory at the firm?" If you're feeling particularly brave, you could also ask what their worst moment is. If the interview is going well and you are enjoying the conversation, you might like to ask "what advice would you give to your younger self or someone in my position?".

More generic or firm-specific questions could be:

- How has [x change in the law] impacted the firm?
- What do you think is the strongest area for the firm at the moment, is this likely to change?
- What can I expect from being a paralegal/trainee at the firm?
- What is the most common mistake you see candidates making?
- Has the firm had to adapt its practices much in light of COVID-19?

It is good to pick your questions once you know who you are being interviewed by. **BIG TIP:** try and write down at least three questions you want to ask by the end of the interview and this should help with the flow and your focus.

# WORKED EXAMPLES OF COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

In this section, we answer some of the common and most tricky interview questions. Again, it must be stated that there is no perfect formula or correct answer to any of these questions. All that is required is for you to give honest, clear and coherent answers and explain why your answer is reflective of your performance or personality and how that will benefit the firm.

## Questions answered in this section:

- Please introduce yourself in 60 seconds or less.
- Why Law?
- Tell us about a time you have worked in a team.
- Tell us about your greatest achievement.
- What is your biggest weakness?
- Tell us about an article that has interested you recently and explain why.
- Where do you see yourself in 5 years time?
- What is your perfect day life?
- How many credit cards are there in the UK?
- What other firms have you applied to?

# WORKED EXAMPLES OF COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Please introduce yourself in 60 seconds or less.

"Hi, I am Meg Hulme. I studied Law at the University of Lincoln. I then went on to do my LPC and LLM full time while working part time as a Paralegal at a Private Client firm in London. I am currently working as a Paralegal at Mischon de Reya. In my free time I enjoy dining at unusual restaurants and taking spin classes."

Use this question to tell the interviewer a little bit about your background, your career path so far, something unique to you/what you like doing in your free time and if you can fit it in what your goals and aspirations are for the future. This answer should be short and snappy and give a quick and interesting insight into you as a candidate.

## Why Law?

"Ever since I was little, I have been involved in my family's businesses. My dad built a successful business from a young age and firmly instilled in me the importance of having a career that is both challenging and rewarding. My desire for a career in law has come from wanting to make my parents proud and enjoying creating commercial solutions for clients. My experience working at Nandos showed me I have a love for client interactions and working collaboratively within a team. I was able to deal with multiple tasks within a fast-paced environment, however, I was missing analytical and academic stimulation. Therefore, I took part in an insight day at [x] firm and this reinforced that a career in law was for me. I then went onto to study law at University..."

This question is one a lot of applicants fear. However, if you get it right then it can really set the interview off on the right footing. This question is not meant to catch you out, however, it does need to be unique to you. Cliché answers such as "I love Suits" or "Elle from Legally Blonde is my inspiration" will not be appropriate. You should talk about your motivations for wanting to study law at University or why you want to become a lawyer. The recruiter will want to see that you have a genuine interest in the law. Try to think of something that is personal to you! You can explain what work you will enjoy being involved in and about any legal work experience you have had. Talk about what you enjoyed about the activities and why they made you want to become a lawyer.

# WORKED EXAMPLES OF COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Tell us about a time when you have worked in a team.

"I am a committed team player having been a Law Course Rep at University. During this experience, I often had to display versatility whilst working with a variety of people to achieve outcomes to help improve and support the course. In order to understand what my peers were experiencing, I would spend time getting to know them on a one-to-one basis and in groups. This would help me to work collaboratively with senior members of staff and ensure each one of my peers' issues or concerns were voiced. I was able to successfully implement five big changes which improved the grading systems and how lectures were presented leading me to win "Team Player" at my University's annual awards."

Start by applying the STAR method. Think about a situation where you have been able to demonstrate fantastic communication skills, been supportive and inclusive and/or when you have had to build team morale. Examples of being in a sports team, dealing with high pressure situations at work or being in a society (law or non-law) are great for displaying these skills. Try not to focus too much on what you gained from it and more about how you managed to help those around you and achieve results together. For extra points, link your skills and experiences back to the firm and explain how they will help you to be an excellent paralegal/trainee solicitor.

Tell us about your greatest achievement.

"In June 2020, my boyfriend and I decided to do a charity cycle for Black Lives Matter. We set ourselves a huge challenge of riding 570km in one day. We managed to cycle the entire distance in 17 hours and 6 miles. The whole experience was livestreamed and we raised just over £15,000. I consider this to be my greatest achievement to date..."

This is your opportunity to talk about something you are really proud of and/or passionate about. Awards, raising money for charity, competing in a competition or volunteering are excellent ways to show off skills and your personality. Think about something you would want others to know about you and make it quantifiable.

# WORKED EXAMPLES OF COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## What is your biggest weakness?

"I often find it hard to delegate tasks out. I am someone that thoroughly enjoys being busy and gaining as much experience as possible but this sometimes means I focus too much time on tasks that can easily be done by someone else in the team. Since coming to terms with this weakness, I am able to prioritise my tasks better and easily identify things that could be done by another member of staff. This means I am able to apply myself further and really give each individual job the attention it needs. It is a working progress but I believe I have improved somewhat since working as a paralegal and I intend to keep working on this area."

This question can very easily catch you off guard. Find a weakness that is not necessarily directly applicable or will prevent you from succeeding in the role you are interviewing at. It is very good to be honest and take the time to evaluate your own actions. Explain how you have overcome this weakness, what you have learnt and how it affects your work ethic going forwards. Always use positive language and try not to be self-deprecating. There is a strength in every weakness so if you can find a reason why this weakness actually makes you stand out or a perfect fit for the role. Showing you are always willing to improve will shine you in a good light!

## Tell us about an article that has interested you recently and explain why?

"An article that has interested me recently is the reporting of the £31 billion mega merger between Virgin Media and O2 in the Financial Times. The Competition and Markets Authority (CAM) finally approved the deal in May meaning the merger will bring together roughly 40 million customers across the UK. This could create a spike in mobile phone and wifi packages due to the majority hold on the market, however, the CAM has reassured consumers this won't be the case. This impacts everyone in the UK..."

Any business story that has genuinely caught your attention will be fantastic here. If you have brushed on your commercial awareness you should have lots of examples at your finger tips. Explain why something is of interest and if you can link it back to the firm or at the very least explain the implications of the issue and what it could mean for the future. The quirkier the better - you will often find this question will lead to an eye opening conversation with your interviewer, which could put you at ease.

# WORKED EXAMPLES OF COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## What is your perfect day like?

"My perfect day would look something like: getting up at 7:30am, going to a gym class and then having a nice big breakfast. I would head to the office on foot for about 11am. I would spend the day liaising with clients and working on big projects with my team. I would then clock off about 6pm and head to a nice restaurant with friends."

In this answer you can really show off your personality, what makes you happy and how you like to spend your time. You do not need to focus solely on work but instead demonstrate how each chosen action benefits and stimulates you into being the best version of yourself. You can really talk about whatever you as long as it is realistic!

## What is your five year plan?

"I am a very ambitious and driven person, however, I appreciate the length of time it takes to achieve a senior role. Therefore, I will be concentrating on making an impact within the team, developing my skill set and taking on more responsibilities alongside setting myself realistic targets in the journey to becoming a Senior Associate."

This answer will really depend on what stage you are at but you must be very realistic with what you can achieve. On average, it takes 3-5 years to become a Senior Associate after your TC. Think about setting yourself milestones in achieving your goals and how you'll be benefitting the business you are interviewing at.

## Quick tip:

As discussed in the preparation section of this guide, it could take you quite a while to figure what examples go best under each question. You also don't want to repeat an example. Therefore, I recommend creating a table that sets out all the experiences and achievements you have ever had (your CV is a good place to start) and then in another column identify the key skills you have demonstrated, what you have learnt and how its impacted your working style.

# WORKED EXAMPLES OF COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

How many credit cards are there in the UK?

"There is approximately 65 million people in the UK and those that have credit cards are roughly ages 20 to 70 meaning approx. 50-60% of people may have credit card. There is likely 33 million credit cards if each person has one. However, some might have more than one so I would guess there are around 40 million in the UK."

This requires a little bit of commercial awareness/understanding of commercial spending in the UK. It should be treated like a maths questions and you should always show your workings out aloud (even if the answer is wrong). The recruiter wants to see you can apply your knowledge on the spot and come to a realistic conclusion.

What other firms have you applied to?

"I have applied to X, Y and Z as they all specialise in Dispute Resolution and have an international presence. I am interested in these firms because they all offer X, Y, Z, however, this firm stands out to me because of its [insert reasons], which matches my working style and personality, which is demonstrated by my experience at x..."

This is a question that you should always have prepared - be careful to not give too much away. The firm will want to see you are decisive and have a small idea of what it is you want to do. Make sure the firms are relatively the same or if they aren't be prepared to explain why they are different.

Quick tip:

To reiterate earlier comments: please do not panic if you have not prepared for a rogue curve ball question like the credit card one. Go back to your foundations, breathe, take a sip of water, take your time. Trust your instinct. As long as you come to a reasoned answer, you will have done well and shown that you can think on your feet.

# IDEAS, TIPS AND PERSPECTIVES FROM PARALEGALS AND TRAINEES.



**TOMI  
IBIROGBA**

CAREER  
COUNSELLOR

INSTAGRAM:  
@MYCAREERCOUCH

## 7 RESEARCH POINTS FOR AN INTERVIEW

- 1. News & Recent Events:** this shows you're genuinely interested in the company.
- 2. Company Culture & Values:** this helps you understand why they do what they do.
- 3. Clients & Customer Base:** this teaches you the nature of work being done at the company.
- 4. Products & Services:** this gives you insight into the company's offerings & USP.
- 5. Management & Leadership:** this helps you identify the key players in important positions.
- 6. Competitors:** this teaches you where the company stands in the market.
- 7. The Interviewer:** this shows that you take a unique and detailed approach to each interview.

Something I always teach my clients about perspective in the hiring process... to effectively sell yourself as the perfect candidate, you must understand and see yourself from the company's perspective.

This means you must get into the mind of the employer so you can properly position yourself.

One way to do this is to spend enough time getting to know what's important to the company & what they're looking for. You have to understand their perspective & convey this in your application.

It's not about you, it's about them.



# IDEAS, TIPS AND PERSPECTIVES FROM PARALEGALS AND TRAINEES.



## HOLLY MOORE

5TH YEAR  
SOLICITOR  
APPRENTICE

INSTAGRAM:  
@THATLAWBLOG

### 5 TOP TIPS FOR INTERVIEW PREP

#### 1. Research

Research the firm/company, your interviewers, the work they do, the culture. Research will help you to answer any questions about the firm/company, and may generate questions for you to ask your interviewers.

#### 2. Practice

Use a mentor, family or friends to practice interview questions with, and ask them to provide feedback. Common questions include, 'why law?', 'why this company?' and various competency questions.

#### 3. Be Yourself

Talk about yourself outside of academics and work. This will allow the interviewers to get to know you as a person, and will make you feel more comfortable (interviewers can spot a liar a mile away!).

#### 4. Transform the Interview into a Conversation

This can work wonders. Don't be afraid to ask questions, and let the conversation flow naturally, rather than answering questions robotically.

#### 5. Relax

The interviewers aren't looking to catch you out. The more you relax, the better your brain will work and the better your answers will be. It's easier said than done, but it will come with practice.

# IDEAS, TIPS AND PERSPECTIVES FROM PARALEGALS AND TRAINEES.



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### MOTIVATION AND ENCOURAGEMENT BEFORE AN INTERVIEW.

It's just before an interview and you're feeling nervous. Let me first tell you this: everyone feels the same. It's a sign that you really want the role you're going for and, of course, you do.

A bit of nerves are good. They can help by making sure you're focused throughout the whole day. But being too nervous, being out of control, could get in the way of your performance. So, right now, you need to make sure you're in control, so you can perform, and show your best you.

You're nervous because you think you might not be as good as the others there today. But, think about it... no one at the firm knows you or has any reason to select you. Except, they did. They liked what you wrote in your application and how you performed in the stages before the interview. They're not doing you a favour... in fact, they think you might be the future of the law firm. You're not an imposter. The firm is looking for excellent candidates, and they think you might fit the bill.

It's easy to build today up in your head, like it's your one and only chance. But, believe me, if you've got this far, this is not your only chance. You couldn't have tricked the firm into letting you the whole way through to this stage. Building today up in your head will get in the way of your performance, in the way of you showing your full abilities. More importantly, by thinking this is your only chance, you've ignored the fact that you got to this stage because of what you did. You're good enough to do it again. So, don't build it up. Whatever the outcome of today is, it's out of your control. Either way, you'll still be as good as you were going into this... in fact, you'll be a little bit better.

You know you're here because you're good enough. You know your strengths. You're in control. Go and perform!

# IDEAS, TIPS AND PERSPECTIVES FROM PARALEGALS AND TRAINEES.



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### 8 THINGS TO TELL YOURSELF BEFORE AN INTERVIEW:

1. You're here at the interview because they love what they've seen so far.
2. The interviewers want you to succeed!
3. Interviewers do not want to trip you up.
4. You are in control and can guide the conversation.
5. It is a two way street - they have to like you AND you have to like them!
6. Back everything up with a great example.
7. Let your personality shine through!
8. ENJOY IT.

# IDEAS, TIPS AND PERSPECTIVES FROM PARALEGALS AND TRAINEES.



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### 10 THINGS TO DO BEFORE YOUR INTERVIEW

Before you read this list, CONGRATULATIONS on securing an interview! This is a huge achievement in itself and you should be really proud to have made it this far. The firm is clearly interested in you, so be sure to show them that you've got what it takes to get onto the scheme or training contract.

**1. Go over your application:** it's really important to remind yourself of what the firm already knows about you. If an interview is not application/CV blind, they will be using your application to ask further questions, so ensure that you know and can expand upon your listed experiences and interests.

**2. Do some more research:** there are new firm announcements weekly, sometimes daily, so be sure to be up to date with where the firm currently stands and what it's trying to achieve.

**3. Go over your experiences and how they link to that research:** a great interview answer will always link your personal experiences/skills back to the firm. Use your research and form these links! I always found it helpful to do a mind map of my CV and write around my experiences any research I've done on the firm and where that links in with me.

**4. Prep obvious questions:** questions such as 'why law', 'why this firm', 'why commercial law' are bound to come up. Make sure you have a great answer ready!

**5. Talk to people:** there are lots of people out there to support you. Whether that's a mentor, a friend or a person from Instagram. If people have experienced a similar interview process to the one you're about to do - ask them questions! It may help to settle any nerves about the day.

Continued...

# IDEAS, TIPS AND PERSPECTIVES FROM PARALEGALS AND TRAINEES.

## 10 THINGS TO DO BEFORE YOUR INTERVIEW

Continued ...

**6. Brush up on commercial awareness:** in a similar way to point 2, the news is constantly changing! Make sure you're up to date and understand how the current climate may affect law firms and their clients.

**7. Triple check the interview details:** the worst thing you could do after all this prep is to mess up the interview date or style of interview. Triple check that you've got all the right details and know where, when and how you're being interviewed.

**8. If you have a lucky ritual - do it:** you've got to try and keep that brain calm. If there are little things you can do the night/morning before an interview, make sure you do them to help you relax as much as possible.

**9. Get to the interview early:** my lucky minute was always 7 minutes before. 10 felt too early, I'd be an inconvenience to the firm and would just have more time to worry. 5 felt too close, what if the interviewer was early or by the time I entered the office and found the right place everything was ready to go?! 7 seemed like the right time for me, but do what works best for you.

**10. Take a deep breath:** you've totally got this, good luck!



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# IDEAS, TIPS AND PERSPECTIVES FROM PARALEGALS AND TRAINEES.



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### HOW I PREPARE FOR INTERVIEW

My preparation for interviews used to consist of doing all kinds of research and preparation. Finding out about the firm, the team, commercial awareness. The list goes on. However, I somehow was still not getting through to the next stage after an interview. I remember thinking that I was doing absolutely everything in my power, so why was it not working out?

Consequently, as I did more and more interviews, I realised three magic ingredients.

#### 1. Confidence

Confidence was one of them. If I did not believe in myself that I was a suitable candidate for this role, how was anyone else going to believe that? Before interviews in the past, I used to be so nervous. I do believe some nervousness is good, it activates adrenaline and reminds myself that I care about performing my best.

However, this was more than just nervousness, I would worry over 'what if' questions, and wonder if I even stood a chance. The minute I started having a little more faith in myself, the better my performance in interviews became. This came with practice, but also not putting too much pressure on myself that this interview is my 'only shot.'

#### 2. Slow down

Another thing I used to do in interviews was answer the question within 0.1 seconds of the interviewer asking the question. I used to do this because I thought the interviewer wanted a quick-thinking candidate, someone who says the 'right' thing instantaneously. However, this meant that my answers were not very well thought out.

# IDEAS, TIPS AND PERSPECTIVES FROM PARALEGALS AND TRAINEES.

## HOW I PREPARE FOR INTERVIEW

### Continued ...

After giving the answer, I would sometimes realise I could have given a better example, or I could have worded my answers better. There were even times where the interviewer had to repeat part of the question because in my haste, I only answered the question partially.

Therefore, by giving myself some time to think (not excessive amounts though!), I produced better worded answers, that were structured more concisely and clearly, and answered every part of the question asked.

### 3. Structure

This links on nicely to the final thing I wish I could tell my past self. I seriously underestimated the importance of structure. Instead of going via a story-telling route, where the interviewer could easily become lost in what I was trying to say, I would directly tackle the question. If the question was tell us about a recent news story, for example.

I would start my answer with 'One recent news story I've read is...' Then I would structure my answer into a simple background of the situation first, then what I learnt from the story/what intrigued me, then link to the legal sphere/the firm, and then finally talk about the long-term effects/links to any other news stories.

This structure came about once I'd revised the SWOT or PESTLE analysis in my spare time. When preparing for interviews, I ensured that every answer I practiced had a clear structure that signposted the listener throughout my answer.



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# IDEAS, TIPS AND PERSPECTIVES FROM PARALEGALS AND TRAINEES.



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### WHAT I HAVE LEARNT FROM MY WORST INTERVIEW EXPERIENCES?

I have definitely had my fair share of interview horror stories, especially when I was an inexperienced uni student.

There are two that are particularly memorable:

#### 1. The Uninterested Interviewer

At one Assessment Centre, the Partner started by moaning about how dull she found the interviewing process, especially as she had to ask the same questions year on year. She even said “let’s try to make this quick.” Needless to say, this was extremely off-putting. I had no idea how to react to this!

I was not successful in securing the Training Contract. The feedback I got was that my answers were “too brief” and she would have liked to have had “more discussion” (!)

#### Lesson Learnt

Never let anyone put you off. Your interview is your chance to sell yourself as much as you can. Be confident and give it 100% no matter what.

**Continued...**



# IDEAS, TIPS AND PERSPECTIVES FROM PARALEGALS AND TRAINEES.

## WHAT I HAVE LEARNT FROM MY WORST INTERVIEW EXPERIENCES?

Continued...

### 2. The Demanding Interviewer

I have come across a number of relatively challenging questions when interviewing for paralegal positions. One Senior Associate asked me to explain three recent developments in the practice area.

This question had me stumped. I managed to give one answer before my mind went completely blank. A long awkward silence followed, with me then sheepishly apologising for not being able to think of anything else.

I was devastated after this and thought that I had blown it. However, I was offered the job!

### Lesson Learnt

Sometimes interviewers want to push you and will ask questions that they don't expect you to know the answers too. They want to see how you cope when you are under pressure. If this happens, just stay calm and explain how would you go about finding the answer instead!



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# IDEAS, TIPS AND PERSPECTIVES FROM PARALEGALS AND TRAINEES.



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### TOP 5 TIPS FOR TC APPLICATIONS:

**1. Be commercially aware.** Demonstrating commercial awareness is being able to analyse how businesses operate, how they make money and how the wider world and their clients are impacted. Incorporating reading the news daily into your routine will help you to do this, as well as listening to news podcasts such as the FT News Briefing and Wake up to money by BBC 5Live. Remember - you gain improve your commercial awareness through work experience too, and this does not have to be legal! In fact, gaining work experience for retail or hospitality businesses can be extremely beneficial. You'll be set targets, you'll be aware of competitors, you'll have to work to a deadline and you'll have to make the company money through sales and great service. Law firms are businesses, and being able to recognise them as such through this skill will really help you.

**2. Take your time.** You should be taking time to research the firm you're applying for well in advance of starting the application. You need to know if this firm is for you, and researching the firm will show this. I treated mine like interview preparation: get to know the firm, their clients, their values, their sectors, whether they've been in the news recently, recent cases they've worked on, their partners, and more. Having this prior knowledge and information before I even began my application really helped me to learn whether the firm was for me. This will also make your application a lot easier, as during your research of the firm you'll get to know what the firm is looking for in a candidate, and you'll then be able to demonstrate whether you have the appropriate skills.

**Continued...**

# IDEAS, TIPS AND PERSPECTIVES FROM PARALEGALS AND TRAINEES.

## TOP 5 TIPS FOR TC APPLICATIONS

Continued ...

**3. Demonstrate relevant work experience.** By this, I don't mean purely legal work experience. Volunteering, working in retail, working in an office, being a supervisor, and working in the hospitality industry are all work experiences you want to discuss, as you can gain great transferable skills such as problem solving, working to a deadline, leadership and delegation skills, analytical skills, organisational skills, customer service skills, and more!

**4. Be more than your grades.** Grades are definitely important. But be more than them. As I have explained above, any work experience is great experience and will gain you great skills. If you are part of a society, or perhaps hold a role requiring responsibility, make this known in your application. This can demonstrate social commitment to a sport or a team, enhance your time management skills, and more!

**5. Research, research, research.** I would compile my research into a word document so it was easy to access as I went through my application. Don't just type the firm into Google and choose the first link that comes up, as recruiters will know this! Delve deeper than the information they offer on their website and use websites such as Chambers Student, The Legal 500, and even LinkedIn to see recent articles published by the partners at the firm and what else they've been up to.



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# IDEAS, TIPS AND PERSPECTIVES FROM PARALEGALS AND TRAINEES.



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### WHAT I WISH I'D KNOWN WHEN APPLYING FOR TRAINING CONTRACTS

#### 1. Believe in yourself

When you're entering such a competitive industry and facing repeated knockbacks, it's easy to let self-doubt creep in. I'd bet we all battle with imposter syndrome at some point in our lives. But we also all know the old adage – you miss 100% of the opportunities you don't take. So don't make my mistake and rule out firms you “don't think you're good enough for” – you absolutely are! Work on building your transferable skills, in-depth knowledge and experience of the legal industry, and acquiring interesting life experiences. Why wouldn't they want you?!

#### 2. Don't take on too much!








Aspiring lawyers are incredibly busy people, no doubt about it. But there's definitely such a thing as taking way too much on. When I look back, I now know that I seriously hampered my efforts in finding a training contract by working and volunteering FAR too much. Which was totally pointless, as the net effect was that I didn't really have enough time or energy to succeed in any of them and I definitely didn't have enough time to spend on applications! So I would encourage you to re-visit your commitments and think critically about whether your time would be spent elsewhere.

#### 3. It's not a race

Trust me when I say, I really do know that this is a hard one to let sink in. But it's so, so important you find the right firm for you where you can really thrive. The right opportunity really will work out at the right time. Plus the truth is, becoming a solicitor is just a hugely competitive process – there simply aren't enough jobs for candidates, so rejection is pretty much a given. Try not to focus on others and just prioritise your own journey!

# INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

In summary, remember these seven pointers and you should see vast improvement in your focus and composure!

-  Be prepared
-  Dress smart
-  Be conversational
-  Apply the STAR method and link your answers to the firm
-  Ask questions
-  Smile
-  Be YOU!

# CONCLUDING COMMENTS

I hope you have found this guide useful! All-in-all, it is very easy to get nervous and weighed down with the unknown elements of an interview. However, if you remember the above seven tips and you speak calmly and logically when answering the questions, you will certainly win the interviewer over. This is your chance to sell yourself so don't sell yourself short.

**Remember:** the whole point of an interview is to see if you can hold yourself well and you can articulate your ideas and thoughts sufficiently. The firm wants to be comfortable that you would be able to handle client interactions without embarrassing them or saying something silly.

The interviewer also doesn't know you so make sure you really spell out your skills and experiences for them.

**BIG TIP:** when it comes to talking about commercial awareness or current news affairs, be careful not to talk about things you don't understand well. If questioned on it, you may land in hot water. It is always best practice to give it your best shot but hold your hands up and admit this is a grey area if you truly do not know the answer. Honesty is key!

As mentioned by many of our lovely contributors in section 8, if you have got to the interview stage then the firm is likely very interested in you. Be confident and know that you deserve to be there. As mentioned earlier, repeat "I am excited to be here" when you get nervous and you will channel good vibes and radiate enthusiasm for the role. Let your personality come across, be smiley and have a joke (if it is appropriate). This will make you rememberable.

Don't forget to thank the interviewer for their time and check what the next stage is before you leave. This will stop you from worrying about when you might find out!

Lastly, you have got this! I can't wait to hear about all of the interviews you smash going forward.

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